

A

SERMON
on
THE BLESSED SACRAMENT
of the
LORD'S SUPPER:

Thomas à Kempis
taken from

NELSON's excellent Book on the
PRACTICE OF TRUE DEVOTION;

and from
Several other Books of
FAVOURITE AUTHORS.



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28

SERMON

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

LORD'S SUPPER

THE LIFE OF TRUE DEVOTION

BY THE AUTHOR



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A SERMON

on the blessed Sacrament of the

LORD'S SUPPER.



THE 23D, 24TH, 25TH, AND 26TH VERSES IN
THE 11TH CHAPTER OF ST. PAUL'S FIRST
EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

“ For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you,—That the Lord Jesus, the same Night in which he was betrayed, took bread : and when he had given Thanks, he brake it, and said, take, eat ; this is my Body, which is broken for you : this do in Remembrance of me. After the same Manner also he took the Cup, when he had supped, saying, this Cup is the New Testament in my Blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it in Remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till he come.”

Before our blessed Saviour entered upon the last scene of his sufferings, he celebrated the Jewish sacrifice of the Passover with his disciples ; and then at the conclusion of it, substituted the sacra-

ment of his body and blood as the Christian sacrifice, in the room of the Jewish Passover, and ordained it as a right to invoke his Father by, instead of the manifold and bloody sacrifices of the law; and then obliges all the following ages of Christians to persist in the same practice by his express command, — Do this in remembrance of me. This is justly reckoned one of the most important actions of our holy religion, whereby as we distinguish ourselves to be the disciples and followers of the blessed Jesus, so we are admitted to the highest act of communion with him.

If men were more sensible of their duty in frequenting the Lord's table, it is impossible they should run to that excess of wickedness which now too generally abounds among us; and if they who do approach more regularly would endeavour to spiritualize their affections, true Christian zeal would increase insensibly, and we should not find that backwardness and indifferency to every thing that is good. How can we pretend to be the disciples of Christ, if we neglect this plain and public declaration of his will? How can we call him master, if we do not what he commandeth us? Has the blessed Jesus instituted a solemn worship among Christians, and shall Christians refuse to partake of it? Did he leave his last injunction to his followers, when he was laying down his life for their sakes? And shall they who pretend to be his followers, never concern themselves in complying with his dying command? To persist in the con-

stant neglect of this positive precept of the Christian religion, is inconsistent with the solemn vow of our baptism, and contradicts that character we profess, of being the disciples of Jesus Christ. Men must be very great strangers to themselves, if they are not acquainted with the impotency and corruption of their nature; they must know but little of their circumstances in this world, if they are not aware of those enemies who are continually designing their ruin. There are few so happy and steady in their duty as not sometimes to deviate from it; the strength of temptation, and the violence of passion, too frequently prevail upon us. Now, if we are duly affected with those wants we labour under, we should certainly apply ourselves to the use of such remedies as are proper to relieve them. To this purpose nothing is so effectual as a frequent participation of the Lord's Supper: this will purify our corrupt nature, by applying the merits of Christ's blood: this will strengthen our weakness, by communicating the influences of his grace, which he has purchased for us by his death: this will support us under all temptations, by a lively representation of those great things Christ has suffered for us: this will restore that peace and quiet to our souls which sin robs us of, by ratifying our pardon, and making our *sincere repentance* acceptable to God: this will subdue the violence of our passions, by spiritualizing our affections, and by placing them upon right objects.

One great end of the Christian sacrifice was, to perpetuate the memory of the greatest blessing that was ever bestowed upon the sons of men ;— to be a standing monument of the infinite love of our dying Redeemer, who thought not his life too dear to purchase eternal salvation for us.

How pure did man first come from the hands of God ! but as soon as he was seduced, he became vile and impure ; his reason was eclipsed, his understanding darkened, and his mind was possessed of *low* and *base* passions ; to this miserable state sin reduced him, and yet, by the free grace and redemption of God in Christ Jesus, he might still be happy, if with the same care and readiness as he lent his ear to the seducing serpent, he would listen to the voice of the charmer *in scripture*, who calls him to repentance. Now, if we have a due sense of those great things he has done for us, if we value the wonders of his love, and set a just price upon that redemption he has purchased for us, surely we shall not be backward to do what in us lies, to publish to all the world this unparalleled instance of goodness, to testify our gratitude for such inestimable favours, and to offer our humble tribute of a thankful heart.

We must consider it is not an indifferent thing, whether or no we approach the Lord's table ; and by abstaining we in vain think to secure ourselves : it is true, when we do not receive, we cannot draw upon ourselves the punishment of unworthy

receiving ; but then we run into another extreme which will be equally pernicious to us. To neglect and refuse the advantages that are provided for us at God's table, and to which we are so earnestly invited, loudly proclaims our contempt of them ; we declare our resolution to continue *in our sins*, if we refuse an opportunity of procuring our pardon : we are not much concerned to do our duty, when we avoid *those* occasions of improving our strength, and receiving that grace, without which it is impossible to perform it. And can we continue in this neglect without offending God ? Can we despise his grace without increasing our guilt, and provoking his wrath and indignation against us ? We expose our eternal salvation, by leaving *undone* the things which he has commanded, as much, as by doing those things he has forbidden.

Before we partake of this holy sacrament, we must inform ourselves carefully in the nature and end of this sacred institution ; for we never can offer an *acceptable service* to God, if our minds are wholly ignorant of the nature of those duties we perform ; and therefore, that our approach to the altar may turn to our profit and advantage, our first step must be, to learn what is meant by this holy action.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was ordained for a continual commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ's death, and of the benefits we receive thereby.

Our Saviour by suffering death upon the cross, made a *full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation,* and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and as he intercedes for us, by virtue of this sacrifice, in heaven; so we on earth commemorate this his sacrifice on the cross, by offering bread and wine (when consecrated by the minister) as emblems of his body and blood, which, in this sacrament, are represented to God the Father, that, through the merits of the death of Christ, he may be favourable and propitious to us. The remembrance of that pardon of sins, and of that title to eternal happiness which he has purchased for us, are proper to encourage our repentance, and our perseverance in all holy purposes to the end of our lives.

When we have once possessed our minds with that necessary knowledge which relates to this holy action, it will continue a standing qualification in all our future communions: *so that*, as this sacrament was established for the commemoration of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, it does also convey the benefits of it to *all those* who sincerely believe and heartily repent of all their sins.

In order to come to a thorough knowledge of our sins that we may *repent* and *forsake* them, St. Paul exhorteth all persons, diligently to try and examine themselves before they presume to eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

There can be *no other rule* to examine ourselves by but the laws of God, our supreme governor
and

and judge, which are contained in the books of holy scripture; and particularly in those of the New Testament, wherein the whole of our duty as *Christians* is clearly and plainly laid before us, together with the most powerful motives to excite us to the performance of it. These are the rules of the Christian religion, by which we should *form* the temper of our minds, and order our conversation in the world, and by which we shall be judged at the *last day*.

The *general heads* upon which we may examine ourselves, are to be met with in many excellent books of piety taken from the holy scriptures, with suitable prayers upon the occasion. I shall not, therefore, at present enlarge upon this subject, but recommend them to your private meditation, as every one is best acquainted with his own *heart*, and should examine himself impartially. The end and design of this examination of ourselves should be, that we may humble ourselves before God, under a sense of our *sins*, and turn unto him with all our hearts, that we may *reform* whatever is or has been amiss in any respect, and be more exact, more watchful and cautious for the time to come.

Among all the instruments of religion, none seems to be of greater use, than frequently to call ourselves to a strict account for all our actions; it is of that importance, that the greatest part of our spiritual improvement seems to depend upon it: for our relapsing daily into the same faults, and
making

making no advancement in piety, chiefly proceeds from the neglect of this practice. When men are once well instructed in the nature of that duty they owe to God, their neighbour, and themselves; if they will but seriously attend to the judgment of their own minds, they will easily be convinced of the several sins they are guilty of: they will then be able to recover *their peace of mind*, and silence the reproaches of their consciences, if they are impartial in the repenting of those sins that gave them trouble and disquiet. But in the practice of this duty of examination, we must beg God's assistance, for our hearts are deceitful, and we are too much inclined to impose upon ourselves: if our vileness and sinfulness *is great*, we are too willing to conceal it; and our sinful passions please and delight us, which makes us loath to part with them. And when we have discovered our sins and infirmities, we are apt to make too slight of them, and not to entertain that sense of their guilt and deformity which they justly deserve.

The longer this work is deferred, the more difficulty there is to perform it aright; and to delay repentance from *time to time*, and put off the *practice* of religion, the practice of virtue and well-doing, to the close of life, or to trust to a death-bed repentance, are indeed most fatal delusions. The uncertainty of our lives is argument sufficient, one would imagine, to induce us to make our peace with God; an opportunity neglected may not again present itself;—into his *awful* and

divine presence, before the face of men and angels, we may be immediately summoned: therefore, whilst we have *health* and *strength*, whilst we have opportunity, let us offer a *willing* sacrifice to God, and perform *this duty* to the best of our power, to promote the eternal welfare of our souls; for with Christ is the well of life, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

A great part of mankind who actually get their living by the sweat of their brows, have not leisure for much retirement, yet *they are not excused* from examining themselves and receiving the holy communion. If this preparatory work is performed with a *willing mind* in the intervals of their labour and on the Lord's Day, they may rest assured, that they will be as acceptable guests at God's altar, as those who have it in their power to dedicate a greater share of their time to such excellent purposes; for to whom much is given, *of him* is required the more.

The best preparation for the sacrament, is a life governed by the precepts of the gospel; for he that really believes the Christian religion, and makes it his constant business to perform what our Saviour has enjoined, has all that substantial preparation which qualifies Christians to partake of this holy ordinance; for this holy sacrament does not so much oblige us to new duties, as it enables us to make good those obligations which the profession of Christianity has *already* laid upon us: therefore, all sincere Christians, who are wearied

and grieved with the burthen of their sins, ought not to be discouraged, because *here* they will find their proper remedy; *here* they will meet with that strength and assistance which is so necessary to enable them to lead that holy life which they purpose for the time to come.

In our endeavours to attain all Christian virtues, there is none we should strive so earnestly for as charity (or good will towards men): indeed without this virtue we are not worthy to be called Christians; for our Saviour, in his sermon on the Mount (which begins in the 5th chapter of St. Matthew), lays a particular stress upon this duty; he there says, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." And he likewise declares that, "unless we forgive men their trespasses *against us*, our heavenly Father will not forgive us *our trespasses*:" therefore he says, "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets."

From this, and from all that is said by the apostles throughout the New Testament, we may be assured, that if it were possible we could be perfect in every other respect in our duty to God, it would all avail us nothing if we did not possess this excellent virtue of charity. You will find it strongly recommended by St. Paul, in the 12th

chapter of Romans—the 4th chapter of Ephesians—the 13th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, and in the 4th chapter of the first epistle of St. Peter.

In the New Testament there is proof sufficient of the divinity of *our Saviour*, to give us a lively faith *in him*, as being the Son of God—which you may find by searching the scriptures; particularly in the first epistle general of St. John,—in all the four Evangelists, and in the epistles written by St. Paul and St. Peter.

The advice St. Paul gives, in his 2nd chapter to the Colossians, may be well applied as a caution to the *present age*, he says, “Beware lest any man should *beguile you* with enticing words; lest any man spoil you through *philosophy*, and *vain deceit*, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ: for in *him* (that is, in Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead.”

It likewise strengthens our faith, to see how exactly all the predictions in the Old Testament, of the *promised Messiah*, were fulfilled in *him*. The holy prophets spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, to prepare the way for his coming: his cruel and ignominious *death* is there foretold (particularly in the Psalms and in the prophecy of Isaiah), and all was verified in his own person, with *pains*, *sorrows*, and *reproaches*; sufficient (one would think) to make even patience itself break forth into this sad complaint:—“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see, if there

be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which is done unto me." But he was as one that was deaf and heard not, as a dumb man that opened not his mouth: he was *betrayed, bound, and led away captive*;—was *reviled, buffeted, and scornfully spit on*;—was stripped, scourged, and condemned to a *cruel death*:—his *sacred head* was crowned with thorns;—and his holy person, which was *free from all sin*, and had been *constantly* employed to relieve distress, was *pierced with nails* and crucified among thieves.

How precious our souls are in the sight of God *we must think*, when we *reflect* on the *sufferings* of our blessed Saviour to redeem us from everlasting misery. Let us for ever *detest sin*, because it is displeasing to his holy spirit. May this unparalleled kindness be so deeply imprinted on our minds, that no time, no worldly pleasures nor temptations, may ever efface the memory thereof.

The Son of God took our nature upon him, that he might suffer *as a man*, for the *sins of men*; and, in the form of man, familiarly teach us the truth of our salvation.

We ought frequently to meditate on the life he passed on earth, from his miraculous birth, to his ascension into heaven; and endeavour, as *far as in us lies*, to follow his example. Then may we *hope* to hear those comfortable words from him at the day of judgment, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." It is by

fice,—the very God, *of very God*, who thought it no robbery to be equal with God;—who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person (as the scripture informs us), and whom all the angels of God worship. What being but he who was equal in sovereignty and power, equally offended by the rebellion, could be capable of atoning for it? Where but on the cross of Christ could there be an altar, whereon to sanctify a sacrifice to the justice of heaven? Or who, amongst all the *high* orders of beings, which inhabited that glorious place, could appear as advocate before a consuming fire, but the Lord of angels and men.

From that blessed and adorable person we have this command; at whose baptism the heavens sent out this proclaiming voice of his high dignity and divinity, “This is my beloved Son, HEAR HIM!” From that Saviour we have the institution of this blessed sacrament; who, in the interests of God and religion, neither flattered the great nor the small, but taught the ways of God in truth, regarding neither the person nor quality of men.

In this institution, our Lord speaks as a master that must be obeyed: the words of the institution are not like those of the prophets, *thus saith the Lord!* but absolutely *do this*, in remembrance of me. The great God that *made us*, the holy One that *redeemed us*, who came and *conquered* for us, in the acceptable voice of his church, calls us to perform this his dying command. Whether we

are in adversity or prosperity, whether high or low, rich or poor, *there* we may all resort for comfort and refreshment. At the table of this King of kings and Lord of lords, we may all be admitted; for with him there is no respect of persons; the sufferings there represented are endured for all: at that *rich gate*, the poorest Lazarus will be relieved; the crumbs from that table will be satisfying and nourishing; and, however afflicted, let us not neglect our duty, which may bring worse afflictions upon us; the holy offices of our religion *may* comfort us, but the neglect of them *cannot* relieve us. Let us then approach *his* altar, and take *this* holy sacrament to our comfort; in full assurance, that if we repent, and obey the gospel to the best of our power, we shall *there* have our pardon sealed. And if we persevere in the practice of *religion* and *virtue*, we shall find that her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace: it will secure to us that peace of mind, which is the greatest of all earthly blessings; without which, every other comfort in this life could not make us happy. Christ has opened his heaven for us, let us be courageous in a few momentary sufferings; in a little time our dear Redeemer, that commands our attendance at his sacred altar, will reward our patience in earthly sufferings, with *everlasting* happiness.

FINIS.

